

FIRST PRESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF UPLAND



ON THE ROAD WITH JESUS

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go.... Jesus said, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57, 62)

This month, we are beginning the church season of Lent. Lent is the most ancient practice of the Christian church. It is an important time of preparation, a time in which we walk spiritually with Jesus, our Savior, to Jerusalem and the cross. For his disciples on the road with Jesus, it was a challenging time of new teachings, change, and deep pain, before the joy of Christ's resurrection. Like these disciples, we are on the road with Jesus. We too often experience challenging and painful times before we can arrive at a time of resurrection and joy, an Easter time. However, thanks to Jesus' resurrection, we know that new life is available through Him. His love and his wise guidance are always with us. We can look ahead and move

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PASTOR TINA BLAIR



forward in life filled with hope and confidence in our Savior.

As the church enters this transition time towards finding a new pastor, we will be challenged to examine ourselves, our community, and our ministries. God may guide us to make some changes. It may be challenging, at times. However, we know that Jesus walks with us, guiding and loving us, helping us to be ever more faithful and loving.

Let's move forward filled with faith and hope!

Steps towards getting a new permanent pastor:

- Session, with the help of Presbytery, searches for and calls a trained transitional (interim) pastor. In the meantime, a Bridge pastor is called by the Session to be the head of staff. That's me!
- Session names a Mission Study Committee to write a Mission Study in accordance with Presbyterian guidelines. The purpose of the Study is basically two-fold: 1. to describe your congregation and your surrounding community to pastoral applicants, including what you wish for in a pastor; 2. to clarify your congregation's dreams for the future of the church and possible changes needed. Surveys and focus groups with the members of this church are to be conducted, and their input is to be listened to. **This process helps your voice be heard.**
- The results are summarized in a document called a "MAP," a Mission Action Plan.

- When the MAP is complete, you, the congregation, elect a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC), which will develop a job description for the pastor. The MAP and the job description are then posted on the national Presbyterian Church (USA) website. The PNC then reviews the applications that come in and eventually brings one candidate to preach to the congregation.



- The congregation votes on calling this individual, with the concurrence of Presbytery.

Although the process can be long, it can work well to match a church with a pastor, through careful listening to the congregation, careful review of applications, guidance from others who have been through this process, and prayer. **Jesus will be your guide! †**

ELEVATE WITH MATT SHOOL



IS EVANGELISM INTOLERANT?

Source: *Alex Tufano 1.21.26*

Every faithful youth worker will endeavor to accomplish two goals in ministry: evangelize students and lead them to evangelize others. Yet as many of us have come to realize, that idea is not always well received in a culture like ours. In a pluralistic culture that elevates individual autonomy as the highest good, the very idea of “converting someone” often is seen as “intolerant,” sometimes bringing strong opposition as a result.

Whether we are just concerned about this ourselves or are wanting to help students navigate the complexities that come with living out their faith, we need to get a firm grasp on *why* Jesus call us to evangelism. To do this well, youth workers need to answer the more foundational question, “is evangelism intolerant?”. But before we can do that, we’ll begin by defining those terms.



What is Tolerance?

At the center of this issue is the value of *tolerance*, an oft-mentioned concept in our world. The kind of “tolerance” in view revolves around accepting everyone’s beliefs, essentially agreeing that every view is right in its own way, even if it’s not “true.” It stems from the postmodern idea that truth itself is foundationally unknowable. Modern tolerance, in short, says “the only truth anyone can know is what is true for them.” No one can take that kind of truth away. To be intolerant, then, is to not call accept what someone holds to be true for them. By

this definition, our efforts to share the gospel of Jesus Christ (with its exclusive claims, like “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father but through Me”), is quite intolerant. But this is not the true meaning of tolerance.

I’ve been greatly helped in my ministry by Mike McGarry’s book *Discover*, which provides accessible yet robust answers to some of the top questions students might ask. In his chapter addressing “Should Christians Be Tolerant?” Mike defines tolerance this way: “respect despite disagreement” (p. 69). In order for us to tolerate something or someone, we must disagree with that thing. Did you catch that? *Tolerance requires disagreement* over what is true. We understand this in many areas of our lives - respectfully disagreeing about what the best flavor of ice cream is demonstrates tolerance: you think I am wrong, yet you show me kindness anyway. Agreeing with me that it’s Wegman’s Nutty Cone would not be tolerance - it would be agreement.

We see this type of true tolerance in Paul’s interaction with the men of Athens in Acts 17. As he stands among them in the Areopagus, Paul references an altar inscribed to an unknown god. He does not grant that they may be correct in worshipping an unknown god (which would be agreement), nor does he slam them for their ignorance (disrespectful disagreement). Instead, Paul demonstrates respect for them and for their intellect, even referencing some of their own poets, as he disagrees with their conclusions and

What is Evangelism?

In order to answer our primary question, we must also understand what true evangelism is. At its simplest, evangelism is proclaiming the gospel. Evangelism is the Christian's faithful response to *Jesus' commission in Matthew 28* to "Go and make disciples of all nations." Peter describes evangelism this way in his first epistle, "...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." (1 Peter 3:15). I've often heard this verse connected to apologetics, as we defend the truths of our faith, but it's also a strong exhortation to be persuasive in sharing the hope of the gospel - with gentleness and respect (true tolerance). Evangelism involves proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have not yet trusted in him for salvation with the hope that they might respond in faith.

If evangelism is about hope and good news, why is it viewed as intolerant? After all, those are positive things! Because the gospel of Jesus Christ makes a claim to an exclusive, objective truth - Jesus is the *only* way. There are not any competing views there, nor is there room for "what is true to me," which rubs against our independence. In addition, I think our tendency to hammer on our fallen nature and need for a savior can overemphasize the negative aspects of the gospel message, creating a false picture that the gospel is more of a burden than a blessing.

Please hear me clearly - I am not suggesting we should minimize or hide the notion of sin from our evangelism. Rather, I think we should be careful to not present an imbalanced gospel message, one that is so focused on what is broken in us that it forgets to remind us of the hope Christ offers. It would do us well to remember that Genesis 3 includes the first curses and the first glimmer of the Messiah. Understanding both the *broad and narrow gospel* can help us maintain a holistic approach in our evangelism.

Why Do We Evangelize?

We're also wise to remember that our evangelism is about the transforming power of the gospel for sinners, not our secondary beliefs and values as a whole. If our goal in evangelism is to persuade the lost that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true and necessary for them, then we would be foolish to demand that our personal convictions about non-essential beliefs are accepted by them as well. Non-essential doctrines deserve charity and tolerance among Christians.

When we refrain from adding to the gospel by proclaiming it with clarity, we remove potential stumbling blocks from our hearers, reflecting the unity in diversity Jesus desires for his church to exhibit. When we define and practice tolerance and evangelism biblically, we can be assured that our efforts to proclaim Jesus are not intolerant, because they are rooted in truth that leads to the flourishing of those who receive it.

Although the world may still label us "intolerant" because of Jesus's exclusive claims, may we not give them ground to stand on by treating them poorly as we seek to persuade. May we be shining examples of respect, patience, love, and gentleness. May we have clarity in the gospel we proclaim and endeavor to not add or subtract anything. May we lead our students boldly in evangelism, as they look to us to see if we practice what we preach. And may we be reminded that the gospel is still good news for us and those we evangelize.



SOLIDARITY, UNITY, AND EMPATHY WITH VAN ROMINE

Does God expect Christians to live in harmony, agreement, and liking one another? It may seem controversial, but I say no. He would be pleasantly surprised, but it's not what he expected. Instead, He expects us to do what is much more difficult. God wants us to work at solidarity in the middle of our disharmony. He wants us to strive for unity in the middle of our disagreement. We are supposed to have empathy even when we dislike one another. I believe God is fully aware that (on this side of heaven), we will only have short bursts of harmony, agreement, and liking one another. However, He always asks us to show solidarity, unity, and empathy. Let's get some definitions in place and see what this might mean for us as members of FPCU.

First, solidarity is "sticking together" through the hard times. Our loyalty to one another must come ahead of any personal or spiritual differences. We are members of the same body... brothers and sisters in God's Family. Jesus paid the price so we could be adopted into this family. Solidarity to our Christian family is very important to God. Way more important than us being right, or smart, or first. Paul says that all his good works are as filthy rags in comparison to what God had done for him. That means we must protect what God has given us, even if we have to give up something we cherish... like our ego.

Solidarity is not a single task. It is a lifelong process which requires us to recognize the value in one another. True solidarity is not asserting that others are 'just like us,' but rather in affirming their value in being different. Paul illustrates this by telling us, "The eye cannot tell the hand.... I don't need you!" It is in this work of value-recognition, that true Christian fellowship can be found.

Second, unity is loving the ones we are in conflict with. That includes friends, family and even enemies. Love is such a huge word. And unity results when our love overcomes our conflicts. Paul warns the Galatians not to, "bite and devour one another". Unfortunately, even us Christians excuse our angry outbursts in the name of "righteous indignation" or "sticking up for the truth". What a shame we justify ourselves east the cost of such silliness.

Unity is needed most especially when the conflict is the hottest, the stakes are the highest and the consequences the deepest. God never allows us to tear down another Christian, or devalue them, just because we think we're fighting for the Kingdom.

Thirdly, empathy is not the same as sympathy. I can have sympathy for a person struggling with poverty, but I can't have empathy unless I've struggled with it too. This is why Alcoholics Anonymous is so successful. It's because recovering alcoholics have been there already, and so they can truly empathize with the ones they are helping. Jesus became a man, not so He could sympathize with our condition. He experienced humanness so He could legitimately empathize with us.

People attending our church (you and me), are not always feeling like Christian heroes. Sometimes we feel defeated, beat down and lost. Paul tells us to "comfort one another with the same comfort we have received from God". That's not an option. It's a command. We all have been comforted by God in very dark moments. Let's empathize with others who are going through what we have already come through.

I believe our church will be tested in 2026, to see what we are made of. Satan wants to "sift us like wheat", to see if he can destroy our fellowship. But, I am seeing solidarity, unity and empathy grow among us. We are already getting ready for the test.

The Bible clearly teaches that we are stronger together than we are apart.

TRUSTEES WITH GARY CUSTER

"God has given each of you a gift from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God Himself were speaking through you." (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to Him forever and ever!

Amen

In 2025, I witnessed many acts of "Stewardship of the Heart," and I cannot express the gratitude I have for the talents and time donated by our congregation, neighbors, and friends. I could only praise God for each of you and our opportunity to serve together, building our future.

I thank Doug Hunt for providing great leadership to the Buildings & Grounds, and Doug Thomson, Tony Webner, Sandy Forney, Paul Fredendall, Luke McClelland, Leslie Borger, Ken Kauffman, Georgia Decker, Herb Joiner, and Jannina Guzman for Office direction. Not only these, but I have seen others helping as they had time, Bob Barker, Janet Hunt, Norma Lee Beaton, and others.

I thank Kim Righetti and Lisa Murdy for proposing a rummage sale. Having the knowledge and perseverance of Julie Bridge, who worked tirelessly till the very end to do what was best for FPCU. Sarah Richardson is ever working, ever smiling, and always working out any problems. Our Preschool Director, Misty Wren, was there helping on many days. Neighbors and neighboring churches helped us advertise. Many of our FPCU ladies helped organize and hang clothing, including Lynn Barker and Janet Kauffman. TO ALL WHO HELPED WITH THE RUMMAGE SALE – THANK YOU!

Randy Righetti, Will Righetti, Bob Kler, and all who contributed to building the Vacation Bible School set, contributed supplies, and taught, prepared food, and fed those attending. We thank all of you!

- Matt Miles for using his skills to support the General Fund's needs.
- To all of the participants who helped with the Trunk or Treat. Thank you!
- To all the Team members: Serve, Gather, Worship, Grow, Deacons, LIFT; Thank you!
- To our Preschool Board and Preschool Staff, Thank you!
- For all of the Sunday School Teachers, leaders, and participants of our worship services, don't forget our Bell Choir.
- Christine Read our music librarian and Paula Riivald our choir secretary.

I know I have not mentioned all names, nor could I. But please, think about how many have given so much in loving service. WE ARE First Presbyterian Church of Upland!!!

LADIES IN FELLOWSHIP TOGETHER

Get a lift from LIFT

(Ladies in Fellowship Together)

*V is for
Galentine's
Day
Games*



**Show Your Love this Galentine's Day for Your
Pals and Gals with a Fun Time of Games**

Friday, February 13, 11am -1 pm, Hart Hall

Doors open 10:45 – Program starts promptly at 11:00

Happy Galentine's Day! Get ready to celebrate by hanging with your girlfriends and playing some fun games. Bring your favorite game, if you wish, or choose one of the number of games available.

Finding its origin in a popular sitcom (Parks & Recreation, Season 2, episode 16, 2010), Galentine's has since become a special day to show your pals and gals how much you appreciate them.

Following a short time of worship and a devotion, we will break out the cards and the board games and get serious about having some fun. Prizes will be awarded to the game winners.

Then we end our program with a brown bag lunch and time of fellowship. We will provide beverages – or you can bring your own.

P.S. Boys are allowed.

**Foothill Family
Shelter Needs Your
Support**

Show your love each month
by bringing your donations of
food and personal care items.

**For more information, contact Carol Diess,
626-482-8862 or sbbmom@aol.com**



Thank you for your generous donations to support LIFT!

READY TO JOIN PARTY OF 8?

THERE'S STILL TIME TO JOIN A GROUP!



*Saturday, March 7th
Time: 2-4 pm in Hart Hall*

MOTHER-SON SAFARI

**Cost: \$ 25 for Mom & Son
\$5 for each additional child**

**Lunch will be served
Wear your best safari attire
Live animals, games, contests,
and prizes**



GATHER WITH SUE FRAZEE



The image features a vibrant, stylized poster for the "FPCU Annual Chili Cook-Off". The poster has a yellow and orange background with red chili peppers and garlic illustrations. The text "FPCU Annual" is in white, and "CHILI COOK-OFF" is in large, bold, red letters. Below the poster are five photographs showing groups of people at tables, eating chili and socializing. The photos are set against a red background with green leaf illustrations.

**FPCU Annual
CHILI COOK-OFF**



FEBRUARY

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 10am Worship with Communion	2 5:30pm Bells	3 6pm Serve 7pm Gather AA Groups- HH & upstairs Radiant Church GR	4 4-5 pm Homework Club	5 5pm Beginning Bells	6	
			5 pm Elevate	5:30 pm Deacons		
8 10am Worship	9 5:30pm Bells	10 9:30am Knitters and Quilters 5:30 pm Worship 6pm Trustees AA Groups- HH & upstairs	11 4-5 pm Homework Club	12 12:30 pm Preschool Board Mtg.	13 11am LIFT	14 Valentines Day
			5 pm Elevate	5 pm Beginning Bells 6:30 pm GROW		
15 10am Worship	16 Office Closed Presidents Day 5:30pm Bells	17 9:30am Knitters and Quilters AA Groups- HH & upstairs	18 Ash Wednesday	19 5pm Beginning Bells	20	21
22 10 am Worship	23 5:30pm Bells	24 9:30am Knitters and Quilters AA Groups- HH & upstairs Radiant Church GR	25 4-5 pm Homework Club	26 5pm Beginning Bells 6:30pm SESSION	27	28
			5 pm Elevate			

FEBRUARY PRAYER CALENDAR

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2-Russell, D.	3-Russell,L.	4-Schreiber	5- Shool	6-Senechal	7- Sindelar
8	9-Smirl	10- Smith, David	11- Smith,Dean	12-Stallings	13-Stewart, B.	14-Stewart, N.
15	16-Subject	17- Sullivan	18- Swenson	19- Thomson	20-Ukwu	21-Van Beek
22	23- Vanvieldt	24-Webner	25- Whitmore	26-Williams	27-Williamson	28-Wilson

Please pray for healing and restoration for:

Jean Vanvieldt, Felicia Foreman, Bill Howie, Lynn McClelland,
 Joni Stallings, David Brinkley, Kay Hester, Iris Joiner, Marie Swenson, Bob Summers,
 Terry King, Jerry Wilson, Robert Chaffino

Pray for those who are homebound or in convalescent care:
 John Dooley, Beth Brinkley, Dick Davidson

Please call Gael in the office if we need to update any information. Thank you. 909-982-8811.

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

04 Margaret Day	28 Jerry Wilson
04 Maria Van Beek	28 Judy Carpenter
05 Bob Barker	29 Paul Fredendall
06 Sue Sindelar	
08 Diane Schreiber	
09 Hal Edmon	
11 Carol Griffin	
12 Georgia Decker	
19 Susan Francis	
26 Ray Bragg	
28 Dave Decauwer	

We would also like to extend birthday greetings to any other **February** babies
 not on our list. If you know of a member's birthday that needs to be added,
 please call Gael in the church office @ 982-8811. Thank you, and

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ALL OF YOU!



**GROWING IN CHRIST,
MAKING HIM KNOWN**

Trustees

Gary Custer, President
Sue Frazee, Vice President
Van Romine, Treasurer
Shawn Kathol, Secretary
Paul Sindelar

Deacons

Becky Custer
Heather Decauwer
Carol Diess
Loreto D'Monte
Ebie Fogle
Lisa Murdy
Constance Phillips
Kim Righetti
Sue Sindelar
Ocha Ukwu

Staff

Tina Blair, Bridge Pastor
Matt Shool, Youth Ministries
Kevin Clinton, Children's Ministries
Jannina Guzman, Office Manager
Gael Lecce, Receptionist
Misty Wren, Preschool Director
Nadina Rearte, Director's Assistant

Elders

William Anguka
Gary Custer
Frank Fogle
Sue Frazee
Diane Hallahan
Pam Polchow
Randy Righetti
Van Romine
Jim Smirl
Donna Strowger
Tony Webner

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